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FOR WHA/AND

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TAGS: PGOV PTER EC CO

SUBJECT: GOC TRIES TO MANAGE RELATIONS WITH ECUADOR

REF: A. BOGOTA 01145

1B. BOGOTA 01279
1C. QUITO 00312

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer
Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) GOC officials said the GOC wants to improve relations with Ecuador, but questioned whether the GOE is interested in doing so. Presidential Communications Director Jorge Eastman said President Uribe felt compelled to respond to Correa's April 11 comments calling the GOC operation against FARC member Raul Reyes a "massacre," because Uribe felt Correa's statements violated a Carter Center-brokered deal that both presidents would refrain from making aggressive declarations and would allow their foreign ministries to work to improve ties. OAS Secretary General Insulza will visit Colombia on April 17 and will continue on to Ecuador, and various Catholic Church and civil society efforts continue to improve ties. Still, Uribe believes Correa's internal political situation gives him little incentive to reduce tensions with Colombia. END SUMMARY.

GOC SEEKS NORMALIZATION, BUT WON'T BACK DOWN

12. (C) Vice Foreign Minister Adriana Mejia and Vice Minister of Defense Sergio Jaramillo told us the GOC wants to de-escalate the conflict with Ecuador that was generated by the GOC's March 1 strike against FARC Secretariat member Raul Reyes in Ecuadorian territory. The GOC has sent strong, consistent signals to Quito indicating it wants to normalize relations, but the GOE is not reciprocating. Presidential advisor Jose Obdulio Gaviria told us the GOC fears Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa is an "unknown quantity" and "unpredictable." Mejia and Jaramillo reiterated that despite the GOC's conciliatory approach, it has not promised to refrain from further cross-border operations if circumstance warrant them.

13. (C) Casa de Narino Communications Director Jorge Mario

Eastman confirmed that the GOC seeks better relations with Quito. Still, he said President Uribe felt compelled to respond to Correa's April 11 comments in Mexico in which he called the Reyes operation a "massacre" and described the GOC's claim to have provided 16 intelligence reports on FARC presence in Ecuador as "farcical." Eastman said Uribe felt Correa's statements violated a Carter Center-brokered agreement that both presidents would avoid aggressive declarations and would allow their foreign ministries to work on step-by-step actions to improve ties. Uribe judged it important to defend the GOC's March 1 raid as a legitimate act of self-defense. In an April 13 response, the GOC accused Correa of impeding Ecuadorian armed forces' actions against the FARC. In a subsequent communique, the GOC cited Reyes' presence in Ecuador as proof of this allegation.

OTHER BACKGROUND NOISE

¶4. (U) Mejia cited the GOE's lawsuit over aerial fumigation against Colombia in the International Criminal Court (ICC) as evidence of the GOE's lack of interest in improving ties (reftel). Correa's earlier comments accusing the GOC of murdering Ecuadorian citizen Franklin Guillermo Aisalla Molina--who was killed in the March 1 raid and was later linked to the FARC by both GOC and GOE officials--and his claims that the GOC is trying to smear him through the Reyes' computers are additional obstacles. Eastman said Uribe believes Correa's attacks on him and the GOC reflect his need to strengthen his internal political situation given recent floods, difficult economic conditions, and the on-going Constituent Assembly. Despite the tensions, both countries downplayed recent violations of each other's airspace.

OAS EFFORTS TO ENCOURAGE NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS

¶5. (U) The GOC welcomed an OAS mission led by Victor Rico to Bogota and Quito the week of April 7 to facilitate communication between the two countries, and Eastman said Rico's visit went well. Still, Correa's recent comments have undone the progress made by the OAS mission. Reacting to the Correa-Uribe exchange, OAS Secretary General Jose Insulza said the normalization of relations would be delayed until the countries recover confidence in each other. Insulza will travel to Colombia on April 17 and will then continue on to Quito.

LOCAL AND CIVIL SOCIETY EFFORTS TO PROMOTE DIALOGUE

¶6. (U) Representative Rivera and Narino Governor Antonio Navarro Wolff told us their contacts with Ecuadorian counterparts have diminished since the Reyes operation. Still, third-party efforts to support Colombian-Ecuadorian dialogue continue. The Carter Center began an initiative in November 2007 to facilitate dialogue between influential individuals from both countries and hosted two meetings in Atlanta and Quito. A third round is scheduled for April 28-29, in Bogota. Although the initial meeting in Atlanta had several "very tense" moments, former FM Augusto Ocampo said that meeting had a cathartic effect and ended well. President Carter has spoken with Uribe and Correa in an effort to reduce tensions.

¶7. (C) In addition, in mid-March then Correa private secretary Javier Ponce (named Defense Minister on April 9)

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invited National Conciliation Commission members Juan Mayr and Father Dario Echeverri to meet with him and Constituent Assembly secretary Abel Acosta to explain the Colombia situation and hear Ecuador's viewpoint. Mayr told us Ponce stressed that Correa does not have a free hand in making decisions, adding that "Super-Minister" Gustavo Larrea is an independent political actor. In a separate initiative,

Ecuadorian and Colombian bishops from border areas are meeting April 15-16 to explore ways to improve communications.

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